Sights & Sounds

The Magazine of Alabama Institute for Deaf & Blind

Spring 2025

Threads of Joy PAGE 4: How AIDB and the Regions Foundation are clothing students across AIDB’s programs.

The cover features a woman and a man standing in front of a brick wall with the word "Threads" painted in script. They are both smiling and holding an oversized check from the Regions Foundation for $100,000, made out to the Alabama Institute for Deaf & Blind (AIDB) for the AIDB THREADS program. The woman on the left wears a sleeveless navy dress with a white pattern, and the man on the right wears a dark blue blazer over a light blue dress shirt.

Serving over 32,000 Alabamians every year.

The AIDB Logo

Lyndi Nichols, a young student from Alabama School for the Deaf, smiles brightly at something off-screen. She is seated on the floor and has her hands behind her back.

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The Magazine of Alabama Institute for Deaf & Blind

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ON THE COVER: Regions Foundation Executive Director Marta Self presents AIDB President Dr. Dennis Gilliam with a generous donation for AIDB THREADS.

INSIDE COVER: Lyndi Nichols, Alabama School for the Deaf

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From the President

Dr. Gilliam is a man with short brown hair. He smiles while wearing a light gray plaid suit with a white dress shirt and a gray tie. The background is a solid blue.

As we are quickly approaching the end of this school year, I am continually inspired by the incredible new developments unfolding at the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB). In many ways, I shouldn’t be surprised. After all, since its inception, AIDB has been the gold standard for Deaf and Blind education, setting the bar for institutions across the country. We have always strived to provide our students with unparalleled opportunities, both inside and outside the classroom, while offering vital services to our clients.

In this issue, I am thrilled to share with you a groundbreaking initiative: AIDB Threads. This collaborative program, created with the support of multiple AIDB programs and units, provides essential services to many of our students. We are deeply grateful to our AIDB Foundation, Regions Foundation, and the many generous donors who recognized this need and came together to make a meaningful difference.

You will also read about a new daycare program designed to support not only AIDB employees but also the Talladega community. This daycare offers a safe, reliable environment for children of working parents, allowing AIDB to give back to our own staff while also contributing to the area.

Another exciting development is the opening of the RISE Autism Preschool at our AIDB-North Campus. This innovative program is designed to meet the unique needs of preschool children on the autism spectrum, offering an inclusive educational environment where students will benefit from a blended classroom experience.

This issue is filled with inspiring stories of new programs created to elevate education, alumnus making a big difference both at Talladega and beyond, and recognitions throughout not only our city but our state—each a testament to the dedication and hard work of our entire AIDB family.

I would like to take a moment to express my sincere gratitude to Alabama Governor Kay Ivey, the Alabama Legislature, AIDB Board of Trustees, the AIDB Foundation Board of Directors, our donors, and the incredible staff for their unwavering support. Together, we are creating a brighter future for our students and the communities we serve.

A signature for Dennis A. Gilliam.

Dennis Gilliam, Ed.D.  
President

The AIDB logo containing the “Deaf. Blind. Limitless.” tagline.

AIDB THREADS Project

Empowering Students Through Innovation and Compassion

By Josh Sharpton, Executive Director, E. H. Gentry Facility

Gunner Hartman from Alabama School for the Deaf enjoys shopping at AIDB THREADS. He smiles at the camera while wearing a stripped sweater. He holds a navy suit set.

At the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB), we believe in turning challenges into opportunities. That is why we are thrilled to introduce AIDB THREADS, a transformative program designed to provide E. H. Gentry Facility (EHG) students with valuable work experience and job skills while addressing an essential need: providing clothing and hygiene items to K-12 students across AIDB’s programs.

This initiative reflects AIDB’s unwavering commitment to empowering students and consumers who are Deaf, Blind, DeafBlind or multidisabled. It combines practical skills training with community impact, ensuring students are equipped to thrive personally and professionally.

A COMMUNITY EFFORT

The success of AIDB THREADS is a testament to the incredible support of our partners, including the AIDB Foundation, the Regions Foundation, the Independent Presbyterian Foundation, State Representative Steve Hurst, Dan Anderson of Diversified Supply, and many more. Thanks to a generous $100,000 award from the Regions Foundation, our vision became a reality. Marta Self, Executive Director of the Regions Foundation, shared, “We are honored to build on our community partnership with AIDB because the people of AIDB are not only passionate about uplifting others, they are innovating with new ways of addressing unmet needs.” In addition to the Foundation grant, Regions Bank is hosting financial workshops for students at the Alabama School for the Blind, the Alabama School for the Deaf, and EHG, equipping them with essential money management skills.

Chelsey Campbell from E. H. Gentry Facility assists Zury Martinez and Avaeya Hawkins from Alabama School for the Deaf in shopping for clothes. All three smile while looking through clothes on a rack.

CELEBRATING SUCCESS

On October 11, 2024, we celebrated the grand opening of AIDB THREADS with a special event that brought the entire AIDB community together. Highlights included a vibrant fashion show featuring students from the Alabama School for the Blind, Alabama School for the Deaf and Helen Keller School of Alabama modeling clothing provided by AIDB THREADS. This joyous occasion showcased the power of teamwork, with contributions from EHG staff, maintenance teams and K-12 campuses.

“We are so excited to have a way to offer our students, when needed, the opportunity to receive clothing and hygiene products, and to also create hands-on job training for our EHG students,” said Dennis Gilliam, Ed.D., AIDB President. “Both the students receiving the items and the students who will be working in the storefront will learn valuable finance and budgeting skills. Our sincerest thanks to the Regions Foundation along with others who have made this program possible.”

BEYOND THE STOREFRONT

AIDB THREADS is more than a store—it is a gateway to confidence and success. Qualified students in seventh grade and above will have access to quarterly budgets, empowering them to shop for clothing and hygiene items while learning budgeting skills. Meanwhile, EHG students gain practical work experience in inventory management, customer service and soft skills development, making them job-ready and self-assured.

“AIDB THREADS truly reflects the mission of enriching lives and preparing students for success beyond the classroom."

Manuela Burton

“AIDB THREADS is an extremely positive start-up with a very caring and thoughtful community. This store will foster great ideas and accomplishments. As a consumer of AIDB, I am proud and hopeful for what AIDB THREADS will bring in the future,” said Ny’Dariun Jones, a student in the Blind Caseload and a Talladega resident who is currently taking classes in EHG’s Dual Enrollment program at Central Alabama Community College to pursue a degree in Business/Entrepreneurship.

“I am proud to support AIDB THREADS as a vital initiative that not only meets the immediate needs of students but also equips them with practical, real-world skills. By combining compassion with experiential learning, this program empowers students to build confidence in managing personal responsibilities while fostering a sense of community and self-sufficiency. AIDB THREADS truly reflects the mission of enriching lives and preparing students for success beyond the classroom,” said Manuela Burton, a Job Developer at EHG who has been active in assisting with implementing the work experience program for AIDB THREADS.

BUILDING A LIMITLESS FUTURE

AIDB THREADS is a shining example of what is possible when innovation meets collaboration. It represents our limitless spirit by creating opportunities that empower every student and consumer to achieve their fullest potential. Together, we’re not just meeting needs—we are transforming lives.

Patrick Woodyard from E. H. Gentry Facility helps Lauryn Silmon from Helen Keller School of Alabama find the perfect fit. They laugh and smile while looking through a rack of clothes.

A Taste of AIDB

By Jessica Atkinson, Coordinator, Marketing and Community Relations

The Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB) is widely recognized for its limitless spirit and commitment to excellence. What might surprise many is how AIDB nurtures a thriving culinary and entrepreneurial culture, offering students and consumers opportunities to learn, grow and savor delicious cuisine right on campus.

INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS

A home-cooked meal is more than just nourishment—it is a vital life skill, especially for teenagers transitioning into adulthood. At the Alabama School for the Blind (ASB), students gain hands-on experience in meal planning, shopping and cooking, equipping them with independence and confidence for the future.

High school students living within ASB spend evenings developing their independent living skills. Students learn that cooking begins long before they pull out a frying pan or turn on a stove! They learn the importance of planning meals, making grocery lists and going grocery shopping. As online grocery ordering became more widely available, Independent Living Skills Instructors have also taught students how to use their technology to place online grocery orders, combining living skills with assistive technology.

Each week, students plan the menu of meals they will be enjoying. “Our dorm is split into two groups,” explained Jerri Alverson, Junior, ASB. “Each day, one group is responsible for cooking a meal from that week’s menu.”

This school year, students have learned how to cook beef tips with green beans, ribs with mac & cheese and collard greens, pork chops with buttered potatoes and California-style mixed vegetables and more! “So far, my favorite meal has been Zamyre’s chicken,” commented Abby Theiss, Junior, ASB. “It was so good!”

Keith Young pours a delicious tea for a customer at Silent Perk. He is concentrating on pouring the tea from the jug into the cup. He wears gloves, glasses, and a black jacket.

SILENT PERK

From the sweet scent of loaded teas to the rich aroma of freshly-brewed coffee, Silent Perk has become a hub where students hone valuable skills in customer service, teamwork and time management, preparing them for real-world careers. Run by students from the Alabama School for the Deaf (ASD), Silent Perk offers a rotating menu of loaded teas and iced coffee. After orders come in, students create the drinks and then deliver the orders directly to teachers and staff in their classroom or office “I have learned a lot about customer service,” commented Keith Young, Senior, ASD. “This experience is designed to mimic a real-world job. We are busy while working and have to manage our time effectively. It is preparing me for my career after high school.”

“We have gotten really busy,” agreed Kamora McCurdy, Senior, ASD. “It has been a learning experience but we have gotten faster at making the drinks and delivering the orders.”

KEITH’S RECOMMENDATION: The Pookie, a raspberry-flavored loaded tea

KAMORA’S RECOMMENDATION: The Caramel and Vanilla Iced Coffee

GENTRY CAFÉ

From bacon sizzling on the griddle during breakfast to the savory smells of popcorn during morning break, Gentry Café is an essential eatery for students and staff at AIDB’s E. H. Gentry Facility (EHG). Gentry Café is run by students in EHG’s Business Enterprise Program (BEP), a program that trains and prepares individuals who are Blind for self-employment opportunities in the vending and food-service industry.

Centrally located on campus, Gentry Café allows BEP students to learn and practice their culinary skills and safe food handling methods. It also allows students to develop key customer service skills such as stocking, purchasing/managing inventory and operating a cash register.

“Gentry Café stays busy but it is a ‘good’ busy," commented BEP graduate Curtis Holman. “Part of the reason I wanted to participate in this program is because I want to find meaningful work and I want that work to be fulfilling. This program provides a pathway towards my desired career and once I complete the program, there is a lot of upward mobility available.”

CURTIS’ RECOMMENDATION: The Croissant and Toaster Breakfast Sandwiches

A student working as a barista wears a bright green sleeve and disposable gloves. They hand a light-colored iced coffee in a clear cup labeled “Wake Up Café” to a customer with a denim jacket sleeve. The background is out of focus, emphasizing the exchange of the beverage.

WAKE UP CAFÉ

Wake Up Café has been fueling the campus of Helen Keller School of Alabama (HKS) since 2023. Conveniently located on the HKS campus, Wake Up Café is a student-run coffee shop that features Community Coffee, both hot and iced, in a variety of delicious flavors.

The café is powered by students taking part in Emerging Eagles, a program designed for students aged 18 to 21 who have completed their high school academic requirements and are transitioning into adulthood. One of the program's many goals is to increase each student’s self-determination skills so that they can be as independent as possible and live a life that brings them joy. Through their work in the café, students receive job coaching and learn workplace skills related to the food industry; a little morning boost with a big impact on their future!

“Working in the café has been good,” said Paris Kennie, Student, HKS. “My favorite part is taking orders and learning what our customers like.” Fellow student, Malachi Clark, agreed saying, “The coffee is delicious. We’re busy [at the café]. I enjoy making, and smelling, the coffee.”

PARIS’ RECOMMENDATION: The Hot Chocolate

MALACHI’S RECOMMENDATION: The Iced Caramel and the Iced Mocha Coffees

Each of these programs represents the heart of AIDB’s mission: empowering students to achieve their fullest potential. Whether it is mastering the art of a perfect cup of coffee, learning to cook a family dinner or running a bustling café, AIDB students gain skills that set them up for a lifetime of limitless success.

Note-Worthy: Jazz at the JTA

By Jessica Atkinson

Event raises over $50,000 for AIDB’s Joe Tom Armbrester Agricultural Program

As the smooth and soulful sounds of jazz filled the air, the Joe Tom Armbrester Agricultural Center (JTA) transformed from a barn to a chic, jazz restaurant atmosphere on a brisk Autumn evening. Sequins, fellowship, good food and a variety of flowers created a superb backdrop for the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB) Foundation’s Jazz at the JTA Fundraising event. The event was held to raise funds for a Greenhouse Garden.

“The Joe Tom Armbrester Agricultural Center, better known as the JTA, is one of the many programs that sets AIDB and the services we provide apart,” said Dennis Gilliam, Ed.D., President, AIDB. “Through this program, all of our students have the opportunity to learn about agriculture and it is absolutely amazing all that is accomplished at this center.”

“The Joe Tom Armbrester (JTA) Agricultural Center offers our students and clients the opportunity to experience agriculture in a number of ways. Plowing, planting, basic mechanics and maintenance, GPS mapping, drone operation, and animal husbandry are just some of the skills that our kids experience,” added Matthew Armbrester, Agricultural, Horticultural, and Biotechnology Program Manager. A day at the farm may include collecting eggs from our chicken coops, feeding our livestock, or picking vegetables from our gardens. Thank you so much to our donors for supporting the JTA and the invaluable work experience it provides to our students. The addition of a greenhouse would not only broaden the scope of what AIDB and the JTA can provide but plant the seeds of success that will last a lifetime.”

As the evening cooled and the music swung, friends of AIDB and JTA gathered together to honor the limitless impact JTA has on AIDB’s students. The evening featured a silent auction and entertainment by Birmingham-based Jazz Artist, The Eric Essix Quartet.

“I have been part of the AIDB Foundation Board of Directors for many years and it has been incredibly rewarding to witness the amazing impact that is made when our philanthropic partners come together,” commented Mike Royer, President, AIDB Foundation Board of Directors. “Through Foundation funds we are able to build new facilities, provide our students with the most innovative technology and deliver on our promise of limitless opportunities. More importantly, AIDB is able to make the seemingly impossible, possible by delivering hope, building self-esteem and fostering confidence and independence within every individual.”

Jazz at the JTA was made possible through the support of these generous sponsors:

GOLD SPONSORS: AIDB and the AIDB Foundation, House of Rep. Steve Hurst (District #35), and The Strain Foundation

SILVER SPONSORS: Allen Oil, Champ Creative, First Bank of Alabama, The Greater Talladega Chamber of Commerce, Hicks Construction, Dr. Mike Kulovitz, Mr. Tom Ritchie, Selwood Farms and Talladega Superspeedway.

Amy and Mike Royer and Debbie Gilliam smile at the camera. Amy Royer has blond hair and wears glasses, a light tan blouse and a thin gold chain. Mike Royer has short, light gray hair and wears glasses, a blazer and a light blue button up shirt. Debbie Gilliam has short, shoulder-length blond hair and wears a black coat with a black undershirt and a thin gold chain.

TOP LEFT: Dennis Gilliam, Representative Steve Hurst with his wife Linda Hurst. All three smile at the camera. Dr. Gilliam has short brown hair and wears a blue-patterned suit with a light blue undershirt and a red tie. Linda Hurst has medium light brown hair. She wears a black and white patterned blouse and a cross necklace. Steve Hurst has short gray hair and wears a gray suit with a white undershirt.

TOP RIGHT: Dominick Jefferson, Student, Alabama School for the Deaf, signs to an audience from behind a podium. He wears a black polo and has short dreads.

MIDDLE LEFT: Becky Watson and Dell Hill smile at the camera. Becky Watson has short blond hair. She wears pearl earrings that dangle, a pearl necklace and a white, silk blouse.

MIDDLE RIGHT: Dr. Mike Kulovitz and Mary Lauren Kulovitz smile at the camera. Dr. Kulovitz has short, dark gray hair and is wearing a dark gray suit with a light blue button-up. Mary Lauren Kulovitz has long brown hair pulled back into a high ponytail. She wears hoop earrings and a checkered sweater.

LEFT: A group of people are seated around a table. Each smile at the camera while wearing business casual attire. Individuals include County Commissioner Tony Haynes with his wife Donna Haynes, State Senator Keith Kelley with his wife Phyllis Kelley, Revenue Commissioner Cindy Pennington with her husband Adam Pennington.

Bottom Right: Eric Essix wears a dark gray suit with a black undershirt while playing a jazz guitar.

New Adventures for AIDB

Inclusive Beginnings, Limitless Possibilities!

By Andy Keith, Chief Educational Programs Officer, Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind

Students Brennan Caldwell and Skyler Roberts are looking in amazement at something off screen while in class.

Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind’s (AIDB) driving mission is to serve! Daycare services were slowly closing in Talladega, Alabama; presenting a growing concern for AIDB. Dennis Gilliam, Ed.D., President, AIDB, recognized that many AIDB staff would need daycare services. Dr. Gilliam saw an opportunity to serve, an opportunity to meet a need, and an opportunity to take care of AIDB’s employees. So that is what he did!

During a meeting, Dr. Gilliam brought up the possibility of AIDB providing daycare services, stating “Let’s provide daycare services for our people.” Quickly following the meeting, the possibility turned into a reality. After a plethora of meetings, a plan of action was created. The first course of action would be to establish a partnership with an existing daycare. After numerous meetings and conversations, AIDB decided to partner with New Adventures Learning Center, a state-licensed daycare facility providing care for children ages 6 weeks to 12 years.

Following the partnership, AIDB and New Adventures needed to establish a location. The Anne Sullivan building located on the campus of AIDB’s Helen Keller School of Alabama would serve as the perfect location for the daycare. A needs assessment was completed, a price point established and the initial registration began. Joey Hutto, Chief Facilities and Construction Management Officer, and AIDB’s Physical Plant Department began the work of remodeling the building to meet daycare requirements. The remodeling work would need all hands on deck. In record time the Anne Sullivan Building was ready for inspection.

The City of Talladega, the Talladega Fire Department and the Alabama Department of Human Resources were required to visit the daycare location and conduct inspections to issue approval for the opening of the daycare. Approval was quickly granted by the City of Talladega and the Talladega Fire Department. But trying to align schedules and with two holiday breaks fast approaching, trying to schedule an inspection with the Alabama Department of Human Resources would present a few bumps in the road to licensure. After a few reschedules, AIDB, New Adventures Learning Center and the Alabama Department of Human Resources were able to come together for an inspection. The building was ready, the stage was set and on December 27, 2024, the Alabama Department of Human Resources granted the daycare its license to operate.

Word traveled fast and we began receiving phone calls and text messages of excitement. An employee announcement with registration information was sent to all AIDB employees.

“I’m looking forward to having my children close by and having a shorter commute after work,” said Holly Alldredge. “With having them at the daycare here, I’ll be able to spend more time with them. That extra time is so important for working moms because we spend so much time away from our families. So having them close by and being able to spend extra time with them in the car or in the mornings means a lot to us."

A service was established and a need was met. New Adventures Learning Center is officially ready for business. The domino effect this service will have not only on AIDB, but the Talladega community is paramount.

Preschool student Matthew Bittle looks at something off-screen. He has bright eyes and a soft smile. He wears a light blue shirt with a pocket on the front.

Drive. Desire. Destiny.

Alabama School for the Blind continues to build its legacy at the 2025 SCASB Wrestling Tournament.

By Jessica Atkinson

Shontia Weaver, Christopher Weaver, and Ricky Weaver stand in a power pose while wearing their wrestling uniforms. They are standing in a gym and each hold their headgear.

Championship wrestling at the Alabama School for the Blind (ASB) has a long and storied history. Since its inception in 1961 with seven boys, no budget and two coaches, wrestling has grown to be an integral part of the school’s legacy. And with this year’s South Central Association for Schools for the Blind (SCASB) Wrestling Tournament, that legacy has only continued to grow!

"Wrestling is a mainstay of our school’s rich history and a testament to the resilience and determination of our students,” explained Alan Nunn, Principal, ASB. “Since 1961, this program has not only fostered athletic excellence but also instilled lifelong values like humility, sportsmanship, and teamwork. With each victory, our wrestlers continue to prove that success is built on perseverance and the courage to rise to any challenge."

SCASB

In late January, the ASB Wrestling Team traveled to Muskogee, Oklahoma, to clinch their 21st consecutive victory in the annual SCASB wrestling competition. From January 23 to 26, they took on teams from across the Southeast, including the Mississippi School for the Blind, Oklahoma School for the Blind, and Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

“It is an honor to be a part of this team and compete in wrestling,” commented Chris Weaver, Junior, ASB. “I come from a family that has been wrestling for generations. My dad was a wrestler and I’m proud that I can continue the legacy. When you’re able to compete at this level in a sport like wrestling, it teaches you how to stay humble and have great sportsmanship. You can be a big, tough guy and still lose. If you have a big ego, that affects the team. That awareness helps you to develop into the person you want to become in the future.”

During this year’s tournament, ASB celebrated a resounding victory with a score of 130. They were followed by Oklahoma School for the Blind with a score of 118, Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired with a score of 84, and Mississippi School for the Blind with a score of 20.

Everyone at the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind is extremely proud of the ASB Wrestling Team and their 21-year winning streak. “Their incredible achievement exemplifies the hard work, dedication and championship mindset that defines our student-athletes,” commented Dennis Gilliam, Ed.D., President, Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind. “Additionally, they are remarkable individuals and I know that they will continue to shine, on and off the mat, for a lifetime of limitless success.”

Shontia Weaver stands confidently indoors with her arms crossed, wearing a red and black "Red Wolves" sports jacket. The background shows industrial-style lighting and windows.

Christopher Weaver poses indoors with eyes closed and arms crossed, wearing a red and black athletic singlet. The background features soft lighting and high windows.

Ricky Weaver smiles confidently while wearing a red and black "Red Wolves" sports jacket. The background shows a scoreboard and the walls of a school gym.

Empowering Students, Protecting The Planet

By Amy Shelly, Principal, Helen Keller School of Alabama

A large part of the vision for our students at the Helen Keller School of Alabama (HKS) is to learn and practice skills so that when they graduate, they will be employable adults. Many of our students have off-campus jobs. While we do have some on-campus job experiences, our transition department is always looking for other opportunities. During a collaborative planning team meeting, recycling was brought to our attention. As we began to look into this, we realized that by beginning a recycling program, we would create a variety of job skills on campus as well as teach our students to take care of our environment.

At the beginning of the 2024-2025 school year, our transition program started a recycling program. We currently recycle plastic water bottles and cans. We have recycling cans placed in all buildings on our campus. We are currently collecting aluminum and plastic in our bins. Students collect the items placed in the bins daily. From that point, our students sort the materials into the correct location. Our students utilize can crushers to make the material as compact as possible and then take the items collected to the local recycling center in Talladega. The city allows us to access the recycling bins so we can ensure that the materials collected will be recycled.

While these activities sound trivial, the skills that are being developed are far from that. We begin by showing the students where the recycling bins are located and they travel with the transition specialist from location to location with our goal being that students will be able to independently navigate our campus and collect the items. When a student is employed, they will need to be able to learn their new work environment and navigate this as efficiently as possible. We teach students the importance of efficiency alongside quality. We want our students to understand that while the quality of our work is important, so is our efficiency in the task. For some individuals, remaining on task and at a good rate of productivity is a skill that must be taught. Our recycling program works on this when we are sorting our cans and crushing our cans.

We have also started shredding services for our staff and teachers on campus and are working to develop a relationship with United Ability and/or Gone for Good to take our shredding to be recycled. As the team planned and looked further into this project, we realized that due to the nature of our school, there was a need for documents to be shredded to protect confidentiality. Our students will pick up documents to be shredded from our staff and teachers and take care of this. Tying into teaching about our environment, shredding fits right in. The shredded materials will be given to another entity that will recycle them.

Our students who participate in our transition program take pride in the jobs that they perform. They understand that these skills that we are developing on campus will lead to opportunities off campus and after they graduate. Amaris Jones, a 10th-grade student at HKS, is one of our most efficient members of the shredding department. Her favorite thing about this job is emptying the containers. She thinks it is funny when the shredded materials make a mess. She is quick to clean this up. Another student who is a part of this program is Gracie Miller. She is a part of the recycling program and her favorite part of the process is crushing the cans. She likes being active and moving around. Keimonta Carr is also a part of the recycling team. He enjoys this job and really likes collecting the bottles and cans. He likes this because he can go around the school and visit while working.

HKS takes pride in our environment and recycling program and we were named a Green Ribbon School by the state of Alabama. This state honor recognizes our contributions to protecting our environment and all that our school does to create a cleaner world for future generations.

Students Gracie Miller, Keimonta Carr, and Amaris Jones pose outdoors in front of large blue recycling bins and bags filled with plastic bottles. Gracie stands with arms crossed, wearing a magenta sweater; Keimonta sits on a bag of bottles, wearing a maroon shirt and glasses; and Amaris stands next to a bin in a black outfit and boots.

RISE Together Preschool

Inclusive Beginnings, Limitless Possibilities!

By Wendi Glass, Director, RISE Autism

Wendi Glass engages with Joston “JoJo” Rock, a student at RISE Together Preschool. Wendi, wearing a black and white striped top, is seated at a small table holding what looks like a red object, appearing to be in conversation or demonstrating something to JoJo. JoJo is wearing a camouflage-patterned shirt and is seated across from Wendi.

When the RISE Autism Program at the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB) launched, it marked the beginning of a transformative journey with a bold vision promising to redefine early childhood education for some of the most underserved populations in the state. The program set its sights on creating an inclusive and nurturing preschool environment tailored to children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Today, five years later, that vision has come to life, offering these children a brighter and more promising future.

At the core of the RISE Autism program lies an unwavering commitment to inclusion. From its inception, the program leader, Wendi Glass, has been motivated by a mission to establish educational and learning environments that meet the unique needs of children with autism and sensory loss while fostering growth across academic, social, emotional, and communication domains. This mission has guided the program’s evolution and shaped its innovative approach to education.

In just five years, the RISE Autism Program has launched the RISE Together Preschool on AIDB-North Campus. This inclusive preschool creates an enriching educational environment where learning happens through play in a safe, nurturing, and positive setting. By implementing differentiated teaching strategies and designing experiences that inspire growth, the preschool supports development across all areas for children ages 3 to 5.

The preschool embraces an inclusive classroom model, welcoming children with autism and sensory loss alongside their typically developing peers. In this setting, children with autism benefit from diverse social interactions, gaining vital communication and social skills through peer modeling. Meanwhile, typically developing children grow in their appreciation for diversity, fostering a sense of understanding and community.

“The launch of this inclusive preschool program is a significant milestone for AIDB,” says Kimberly Baker, Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Accreditation. “By integrating children with autism alongside their peers, we’re creating learning environments that inspire empathy, compassion and respect from the very start of their educational journey and will benefit them throughout their lives.”

In our pursuit of providing the best support for children and families in our communities, we recognize the importance of creating a strong connection and well-defined bridge between early intervention programs and the K-12 educational system. This connection is essential for ensuring a smooth transition for children as they progress through different stages of their educational journey. The RISE Together Preschool employs key personnel to collaborate and create individualized learning plans that address challenges and capitalize on each child’s strengths using evidence-based practices.

The impact of the RISE Together Preschool extends far beyond the classroom. There is also an emphasis on facilitating a seamless transition for children and families within our communities. We believe it is important to establish a strong connection between early intervention services and the K-12 educational system. At the RISE Together Preschool, our approach includes offering families individualized resources and support to empower them to make informed decisions about their child’s educational path. Additionally, we prioritize collaboration with families and maintain close partnerships with local school districts to ensure that students transition effortlessly into their K-12 educational environments.

Today, the RISE Autism Program stands as a testament to the power of vision, dedication, and collaboration. “What began with one staff member at E. H. Gentry Facility addressing the needs of adult programs has expanded into a statewide initiative, serving as a vital resource for children, families and educators across Alabama”, says Josh Sharpton, Executive Director of E. H. Gentry Facility. “Since its inception, it has grown exponentially, becoming a cornerstone for statewide support and innovation.”

The RISE Autism Program at AIDB is more than just a supportive educational program. It is a beacon of hope, demonstrating what is possible when we commit to creating opportunities for every child to RISE to their fullest potential. At RISE Together Preschool, children play, learn, and grow in an environment that celebrates inclusive beginnings and limitless possibilities.

RISE Together Preschool student Valentina Mata finds the rhythm during the school day. She is smiling and looking at something to the right of the camera. She holds two xylophone sticks.

Campus Updates

By Jacque Cordle, Director, Marketing and Community Relations

Jenny Savage named Executive Director of the Office of Field Services at AIDB and Josh Sharpton Named Executive Director of E. H. Gentry Facility

The Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB) is pleased to announce the appointment of Josh Sharpton as Executive Director of E. H. Gentry Facility (EHG). With over 23 years of experience in Deaf Education and 21 years of dedicated service to AIDB, Sharpton brings a wealth of professional expertise and significant accomplishments in the field of educational and rehabilitation services for individuals who are Deaf, Blind and DeafBlind.

“Mr. Sharpton has shown a great deal of dedication to the mission of AIDB and the consumers we serve,” said Dennis Gilliam, Ed.D., President, AIDB. “From being a student at AIDB, a teacher, and then through administration, Mr. Sharpton has an excellent role model to those who seek continuous improvement.”

Most recently, Sharpton served as the Director of Deaf Services/DeafBlind Programs at EHG, a position he has held since October 2020. In June 2024, he was named Interim Executive Director of EHG, following the appointment of then-Executive Director Jessica Edmiston as AIDB’s Chief Adult Programs Officer. Prior to his tenure at EHG, Sharpton worked at his alma mater, Alabama School for the Deaf, where he served as an educator and later as Director of the Career Technical and Education Department.

Sharpton holds a Bachelor of Arts in Communication Arts from Gallaudet University, a Master of Science in Deaf Education from the University of Tennessee, and a Class A Certificate in Instructional Leadership from Jacksonville State University.

"I am honored to continue serving and leading E. H. Gentry, where our mission is to empower students who are Deaf, Blind, DeafBlind, or have other disabilities to achieve economic and personal independence. We are committed to equipping them with the tools needed to succeed and thrive in today’s society. At E. H. Gentry, we remain steadfast in breaking barriers and creating opportunities that transform lives," said Sharpton.

Sharpton wears tortoise shell glasses, a blue blazer, and a light blue checkered button-down shirt. He has gray hair styled neatly and is smiling warmly at the camera.

Also announced is the appointment of Jenny Savage as Executive Director of the Office of Field Services. In this pivotal role, Savage will provide visionary leadership to enhance AIDB’s statewide network of Regional Centers and Senior Services, delivering transformative support to individuals of all ages across Alabama.

“Ms. Savage has become synonymous with reliability and quality of work. As an AIDB employee, Jenny has demonstrated a willingness to provide exemplary service to all those AIDB serves,” said Dennis Gilliam, Ed.D., President, AIDB. “We are thrilled to see her make this transition.”

With over 29 years of experience in the community service field, Savage has excelled as an educator, counselor, and advocate. She brings a proven track record of championing the needs of AIDB’s communities, forging impactful partnerships, and creating opportunities that empower individuals to lead meaningful, successful lives. Since 2012, she has served as Director of the Montgomery Regional Center and has also stepped in as Interim Director for other AIDB Regional Centers, demonstrating her expertise and commitment to communities throughout the state.

“I am thrilled to begin in this new role as Executive Director of the Office of Field Services,” said Savage. “My love for AIDB began in 1993 as a college intern at E. H. Gentry Facility in the Social Work program and Recreation Therapy department. I was thrilled to officially join the AIDB family by coming to work in the Office of Field Services in 2012. I wholeheartedly believe in AIDB’s mission and vision. I care deeply about the people we serve and am honored to work alongside them through our ten Regional Centers and Senior Services. Together, we can make a lasting difference. I’m excited about this opportunity and will give my very best for AIDB and the communities we serve.”

As Executive Director of the Office of Field Services, Savage will lead AIDB’s statewide team, fostering community partnerships and collaborating with colleagues across AIDB to provide life-changing services for Alabamians who are Deaf, Blind and DeafBlind.

Jenny Savage with shoulder-length brown hair wearing a red top and teardrop-shaped earrings.

Beavers Named Executive Director of the Alabama Freedom Center for the Blind

Isaac Beavers has been named the Executive Director of Alabama Freedom Center for the Blind (AFCB), Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB).

"Isaac has an extremely strong programmatic background and has consistently demonstrated a Structured Discovery-based professionalism and understanding within his 27-year tenure within AIDB," stated AIDB President Dr. Dennis A. Gilliam. "Isaac has facilitated a robust partnership with the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS) which partnered to establish the AFCB in 2016 and as such, Isaac will also serve as a liaison for adult services with ADRS. These attributes and expertise will further establish the AFCB, which is one of nine distinct programs in the nation utilizing the Structured Discovery methodology and philosophy, as a state and national leader in the field of blindness training - especially as we grow and enhance programs and services within AIDB-North, Decatur. I am truly excited about the possibilities for stability and growth under Mr. Beavers’ leadership."

Beavers is a graduate of Alabama School for the Blind. He earned a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from The University of Alabama and a Master of Education in Rehabilitation Counseling from Auburn University. As a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor, Beavers spent the first 17 years of his career providing direct services to consumers as the Case Manager for the Blind at the Huntsville Regional Center. Beavers served as Interim Director of the AIDB Huntsville Regional Center from 2011 until his promotion to Regional Director in 2014. Beavers most recently served as AIDB Executive Director of Field Services since August 2022.

Beavers is smiling warmly at the camera. He is wearing black-framed glasses, a cream-colored suit, a white dress shirt, and a patterned tie.

Campus Snapshot

E-I-E-I-O at AIDB: ASB student Keidrayah Maddox makes a new friend at Joe Tom Armbrester Agricultural Center

Keidrayah Maddox, with pink and white hair accessories, laughs joyfully while holding a golden-brown chicken in her arms. She is wearing a white long-sleeved top and standing outdoors with a wooden chicken coop in the background.

Building Safety

By Alan Nunn, Principal, Alabama School for the Blind

Great things happen inside the fence. Just ask the students who call Alabama School for the Blind home!

A view through a black iron fence of the Alabama School for the Blind campus. Several children are visible, playing in an open area behind the fence. In the background are multiple red brick buildings, with the largest featuring prominent white pillars. A brick pillar supporting the fence is visible in the foreground left corner.

The safety of Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB) students and staff is the Institute’s first and highest priority. In keeping with this philosophy, the AIDB Administration and Board of Trustees voted to construct a fence around the Alabama School for the Blind campus. Both the Alabama School for the Deaf and the Helen Keller School of Alabama already have fences in place. While it is rare to have people cut across our campus, the new fence should deter anyone who might be tempted to use the campus as a shortcut and also provide additional security for our students and staff. The AIDB Foundation facilitated the funding for the project.

The fence is made of two-foot-by-two-foot square brick columns with each being four and a half feet tall with a concrete brick cap. The columns are connected with black wrought iron fencing. The appearance will not only be consistent with that of the other two campuses, but it will also blend well with the architecture on the Alabama School for the Blind campus.

The fence extends from the back corner of the campus where Hamm Drive meets Asbury, along Asbury, South Street East to Chaffee, and along Chaffee to Hamm Drive. It will provide a sense of security as well as enhance the beauty of our campus. Sophomore Will Burgess said, “I am glad that AIDB cares about our safety.” Teacher aide April Graham said, “Great things happen inside the fence!”

Master Teacher Model

Cultivating Excellence in Education at ASD

By Jason Roop, Director, NTID Regional STEM Center and Interim Director, High School Department, Alabama School for the Deaf

At the Alabama School for the Deaf (ASD), the commitment to fostering academic achievement and personal growth is evident in every classroom. Central to this mission is the implementation of the Master Teacher Model, a framework designed to elevate teaching practices, enhance student learning, and build a collaborative community among educators. This innovative approach has transformed the educational experience for both students and staff, ensuring that excellence is not just a goal but a daily practice.

WHAT IS THE MASTER TEACHER MODEL?

The Master Teacher Model emphasizes mentorship, continuous professional development, and the sharing of best practices among educators. Master Teachers are experienced professionals who serve as role models and leaders within the school. They mentor their peers, provide instructional support, and lead initiatives aimed at improving teaching strategies and student outcomes.

At ASD, the model is tailored to meet the unique needs of students who are Deaf or hard of hearing. Master Teachers work closely with their colleagues to incorporate visual learning techniques, American Sign Language (ASL), and other specialized strategies that promote accessibility and engagement.

A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO GROWTH

The Master Teacher Model thrives on collaboration. Team meetings provide a platform for educators to share challenges, brainstorm solutions, and celebrate successes. These sessions are more than just check-ins; they are opportunities for collective problem-solving and professional growth.

Co-teaching opportunities allow Master Teachers to model effective instructional methods. By working alongside their peers, they demonstrate techniques that enhance student understanding and engagement.

The ultimate beneficiaries of the Master Teacher Model are the students. With educators equipped with advanced strategies and tools, students receive a more enriching and personalized education. Master Teachers also contribute to curriculum development, ensuring that lessons are both rigorous and relevant. The emphasis on accessibility ensures that all students, regardless of their background or learning style, can thrive. From incorporating technology to fostering a bilingual learning environment in English and ASL, the Master Teacher Model is paving the way for academic success.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A CORNERSTONE OF THE MODEL

Continuous professional development is a cornerstone of the Master Teacher Model. Regular workshops, peer observations, and feedback sessions empower educators to refine their craft. These opportunities not only enhance teaching practices but also foster a culture of lifelong learning within the ASD community.

LOOKING AHEAD

The Master Teacher Model has already made significant strides in advancing educational excellence at ASD. Moving forward, the school plans to expand the program by incorporating more technology-driven teaching tools and broadening the scope of professional development opportunities. Additionally, ASD is exploring ways to involve parents and the wider community in the learning process, further enriching the educational experience for students.

The Master Teacher Model at ASD is more than an instructional framework; it is a testament to the school’s dedication to creating an environment where educators and students can excel together. By fostering collaboration, innovation, and continuous improvement, the model ensures that ASD remains at the forefront of Deaf education.

As the program continues to evolve, one thing is certain: the Master Teacher Model is not just shaping better educators but also empowering students to achieve their full potential. And that, above all, is the true measure of its success.

"Co-teaching as a team of one hearing teacher and one Deaf teacher is a journey of growth—for both of us. Seeing our collaboration lead to improved student outcomes is the most rewarding part of the process."

Debbie Gilliam

Debbie Gilliam with shoulder-length blonde wavy hair smiling at the camera. She is wearing a light beige or tan blazer and a necklace.

"The Master Teacher Model has given us the opportunity to learn from one another and grow as educators. By sharing our knowledge and experiences, we’re creating a stronger, more supportive learning environment for our students."

Harry Wood and Cody Neighbors

Two students in a classroom working on tablets. A teacher stands between them. On the left, Tusi Silas has braids, is wearing glasses and a cream beanie hat with a star design, and sits in a cream cable-knit sweater. In the middle, Megan Everett has long blonde hair in a dark top and signs in American Sign Language while looking intently at the screen. On the right, Brayden Weeks, in a navy hoodie, is also focused on his work. The background shows a classroom with bookshelves, a globe, and bulletin boards.

The Ties That Bind

By Jessica Love, Administrative Assistant to the Executive Director, Alabama Industries for the Blind

Joe Gable, an elderly man with gray hair and glasses, works intently at a sewing machine. He is wearing a red and white plaid flannel shirt and is focused on his work. The space has industrial ceiling lights visible in the background, creating a warm atmospheric lighting.

On December 20, 2019, the President of the United States signed the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act and with it, directed the establishment of the U.S. Space Force (USSF) as the sixth branch of the armed forces.

For over 60 years, Alabama Industries for the Blind (AIB) has been the sole manufacturer of first-issue neckties across all branches of the United States Military. In keeping with this time-honored tradition, AIB has been tasked with developing the new Space Force Necktie. The development process began in 2022, with production of the first ties scheduled for 2025.

Thirty-three employees assigned to the Necktie Production Line work together to produce approximately 250,000 neckties per year. Currently, AIB produces a khaki necktie for the United States Marines, a green necktie in two sizes, along with a black necktie for the United States Army, and a navy-blue necktie for the United States Air Force. The new Space Force necktie will combine components of the green Army necktie and the navy-blue Air Force necktie. Until the first official Space Force neckties are manufactured, the USSF continues to utilize the United States Air Force necktie.

Recent graduate from the United States Space Force Academy, Trevor Johnson, has a closer “tie” to the uniform than most of his graduating class. Trevor’s mother, Laura Martin, is an AIB employee at the Anniston Army Depot Base Supply Center. His maternal grandfather, Jeff Johnson, is a retiree from the AIB Manufacturing facility; and his maternal grandmother, Cherry Johnson, is an employee with the AIB Sales and Marketing program. Trevor’s mother shares, “My son Trevor just graduated from the United States Space Force. He was so excited to flip his tie over and show me that it was made at Alabama Industries for the Blind. He has shared the AIDB story with everyone he meets in the Space Force. He has pride in the AbilityOne and SKILCRAFT® brand because of the personal connection he has through family.”

New Products at Alabama Industries for the Blind

The bandoleer pouch was originally developed during the late 15th century. It was used by soldiers to carry charges or gunpowder. Throughout the 16th and 17th centuries as weapons changed and developed, so did the bandoleer. By the late 19th century a somewhat different version of the bandoleer, used to carry modern metallic clips came into use.

Today’s modern military uses a Modular Lightweight Load-Carrying Equipment known as MOLLE. The MOLLE is a completely modular system that is worn, rather than carried, and which allows for flexibility and improved mission efficiency without compromising mobility or readiness. The Specialty Defense System triple cell, double mag pocket bandoleer is a component of the MOLLE system that can be found snapped into the claymore mine pocket of the main rucksack. This pouch will hold (6) USGI mags.

Alabama Industries for the Blind (AIB) began producing the modern bandoleer pouch at the Talladega Manufacturing Facility in January of 2024. This contract is shared with Mississippi Industries for the Blind. To date, AIB has produced approximately 55,000 units. The contract is for five years and will continue through 2028. The majority of sewing for the bandoleer is completed with automated sewing machines. The talented AIB Maintenance staff works with each operation of the manufacturing process to create patterns or “jigs” to work with the automated sewing machines. An employee who is blind or visually impaired is then able to fit material into the “jig,” and press a button for the machine to complete their operation. Because of these innovations, the bandoleer manufacturing line provides the highest percentage of Blind/Visually Impaired labor across all AIB sewing lines at 85% Blind labor.

One such operation is performed by Michael Armstrong. Michael performs one of the first operations in the making of the bandoleer. He sews the flaps that snap in place to cover the ammunition magazine. Michael lost his sight in an accident in 2011. He began to learn work skills at AIB in 2013 through an adult education class at the E. H. Gentry Facility (EHG). Michael came on board as a full-time employee at AIB in 2014.

Christina Atkinson has glasses and short dark hair. She is wearing a bright blue shirt and is working at a manufacturing workstation. She uses a heat cutter to remove excess material from a bandoleer pouch.

Myles Trammell is wearing protective eyewear and a blue-collared long-sleeve shirt. He performs a “fit-check” to ensure magazines fit securely in the bandoleer pouch. Behind him, boxes are stacked on industrial shelving.

“It is a blessing to work in a place that I love, and to have co-workers that are more like family.”

Michael Armstrong

After the flaps leave Michael’s workstation, they move to Joe Gable. Joe punches a hole in the flap so that a snap can be added further down the line. Joe is a lifelong resident of Talladega County but only came to AIB in 2021 after a stroke affected his vision. Joe considers it a great honor to be able to do his part for the military.

Toward the end of the production line, Myles Trammell performs the “fit-check” on every bandoleer pouch that comes through the line. This involves placing six empty magazines in the pouch. He ensures that they fit securely and that the tops snap into place.

Myles attended the Alabama School for the Blind from kindergarten through high school. After graduating in 2015, Myles attended EHG to further his education and gain job and independent living skills. He began work at AIB in 2021. Myles is a dedicated employee who rarely misses a day of work. He is extremely proud of the fact that “his” production line is a month ahead of schedule.

At the next station, Christina Atkinson performs a finish work operation, using a heat cutter to remove excess material from the pouch. Christina grew up in Panama City Beach, Florida. An illness in 2006 left her with vision loss. When her daughter left for college at The University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa in 2010, Christina decided to pursue options that would put her closer to her daughter. An Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS) counselor in Tuscaloosa suggested EHG. Christina began classes there in early 2011, and by November of that year was working at AIB.

Through the years, as production lines have phased in and out, Christina has worked on several items for the U.S. Military including the JS List Bag, the Helmet Cover, and the Flyer’s Kit Bag. Christina says, “I feel honored to be able to help the members of our Nation’s Armed Services.”

Alabama Freedom Center at Home on AIDB-North Campus

By Isaac Beavers, Executive Director, Alabama Freedom Center for the Blind

Amid the sounds of bulldozers, jackhammers, and lawn mowers you can hear the tap, tap, tap, of metal on asphalt as five blind-folded students using long, white canes travel southwest toward building three, also known as, the Alabama Freedom Center for the Blind (AFCB).

As students walk, they talk, joke, and occasionally check on one another’s progress. The first stop of the day is kitchen two, which is one of three state-of-the-art learning labs used for teaching Home Management. Kitchen two is also used for student lunch, employment class, and seminar, which is an interactive discussion on various topics. After announcements, some students stay for class, some move across the hall for Cane Travel instruction, and the rest make their way to the west hall toward the two Assistive Technology (AT) Labs and the two Braille classes. Currently, one lab and one classroom is being used, but the AFCB program was built with growth in mind. “We have the facilities to serve 18 students and double our staff and we hope to reach capacity by next year,” says Isaac Beavers, AFCB’s newly appointed Executive Director.

At 4:00 p.m., the morning soundscape repeats itself with students traveling northeast toward the two student apartment buildings (building 10 and 11). Each building has nine individual apartments, a shared lobby, and multipurpose room. The lobby of building 10 features exercise equipment and will be the location for a self-defense class beginning in winter of 2025.

“The apartments are very nice. They were one of the factors that I considered when I chose AFCB,” says Kimberly Chichester, a student from Georgia.

Several student-led events have taken place in the apartments including exercise hours, a football tailgate, and pumpkin carving. Students participate in Decatur Regional Center activities and pick their mail up in the Administrative building.

However, AFCB students aren’t confining their activities to campus. The program provides students with skills that they can use in any setting. Students are regular customers at Walmart, Publix, salons/barbershops, and a few local restaurants. Shane Koestner, a student from Opelika said, “Over the Thanksgiving holiday, I stayed alone in a new city. I used my skills to walk to a nearby restaurant. I came to AFCB because I wanted to be challenged and I felt this program would do that.”

In April of 2024, the AFCB moved from rented apartments in Birmingham to AIDB-North Campus in Decatur. “Plans for a permanent home for AFCB were a part of the early planning for AIDB-North Campus,” notes Beavers. “Staff and students are comfortable here and that makes it feel like home.”

Roana Norton and Tyree James navigate campus between their apartments and classrooms. They wear learning shades and are using white canes to navigate a paved walkway. They are dressed in winter clothing and are walking side by side under a covered walkway with columns. Trees and grass are visible in the background.

A Look Back

By Alan Nunn and Jessica Atkinson

Exploring Alabama School for the Blind’s Rich Wrestling History

The Alabama School for the Blind (ASB) is no stranger to championship athletics. Since 1961, the campus has ignited with excitement each winter as wrestling takes center stage. Having started with just seven boys, no budget and two coaches, the sport has grown, each year, to become essential to the culture of the school.

1971-72: STATE CHAMPIONS

As a new decade dawned, ASB wrestling elevated its program with a championship season. Throughout the 1971-1972 season, the team competed valiantly to earn a 15-4 record going into the 1A-2A-3A Championship Team Tournament hosted at Gardendale High School. Throughout the competition, the team faced some of the toughest competition of the season. But they prevailed and as the last bell rang, the team had much to celebrate. The team saw two first-place finishes with David Trevino and Jeffrey Williams, two second-place finishes with Allan Fulghum and Calvin Young, two third-place finishes with Leonard Brewster and Charlie Carroll, and three fourth-place finishes with Jimmy McDade, Neal McGairty, and Gordon Dunn. David Trevino was also honored as the outstanding wrestler of the tournament. The 1971-72 team, coached by Jim Barnes, was named the number one team in the State 1A-2A-3A Tournament.

SCASB

ASB’s wrestling dominance does not stop at state lines. The team’s success shines annually at the South Central Association of Schools for the Blind (SCASB) wrestling competition. The team travels throughout the southeast to take on teams from Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma and Texas. With this year’s victory, ASB won the competition for 21 consecutive years.

“Attending SCASB is a great experience because it shows we’re not the only school for the Blind that has a wrestling team,” commented Ricky Weaver, Junior, ASB. “It’s different than competing against mainstream schools because the athletes who attend SCASB are just like us. We’ve been reigning SCASB champs for years but this tournament still helps us find ways to progress to the next level and improve.”

STATE TITLES

For high school athletes, winning a state title represents the highest level of achievement within their weight class. It is often the culmination of years of hard work and dedication to the sport. The athletes at ASB are no strangers to this champion mindset, with 24 wrestlers earning an Individual State Wrestling Title.

“You never forget the feeling of the referee putting your hand above your head and clenching that title,” said ASB’s first state champion, Ronald Garrett. Mr. Garrett began his wrestling career as a junior and that year, he made it to the final round of the State Wrestling Championship before succumbing to defeat. As a senior, Mr. Garrett returned to claim his title.

“Personally, wrestling at ASB changed my life,” added Mr. Garrett. After graduation, Mr. Garrett continued his education at Auburn University on an athletic scholarship and wrestled as a freshman. He would return to his alma mater in 1965 when principal, B. Q. Scruggs, hired Mr. Garrett as a teacher. Throughout his tenure at ASB, Mr. Garrett would serve 14 years as Wrestling Coach and 15 years as Principal.

“Wrestling is what allows ASB to compete,” said Mr. Garrett. “Although we’ve had many team victories, it was a second-place finish that meant the most to me. We participated in a tournament in the Auburn-Opelika area, where we faced teams from South Alabama instead of our usual East Alabama competitors. We finished second to a team that later won the State Championship. At the end of the tournament, one of the opposing coaches said to me, ‘I thought these Blind wrestlers would be in the way, but your team defeated four of my best wrestlers.’ As a coach, that moment was incredibly meaningful to me.”

INDIVIDUAL STATE CHAMPIONS FROM ASB INCLUDE:

Ronald Garrett........................1963..................127 lbs

Tommy Couch.........................1964..................180 lbs

Ricky Ne Smith.......................1964....................95 lbs

Tommy Couch.........................1965..................180 lbs

Ricky Ne Smith.......................1966...................119 lbs

Ricky Ne Smith.......................1967..................154 lbs

Carlton Pendegraph...........1967..................127 lbs

David Talley...............................1968..................154 lbs

David Talley...............................1969..................154 lbs

Calvin Young............................1969..................133 lbs

David Talley...............................1970..................154 lbs

David Trevino...........................1972..................132 lbs

- Voted Outstanding Wrestler in State Tournament

Jeffery Williams......................1972..................145 lbs

Leonard Brewster................1973..................126 lbs

Allan Fulghum.........................1973..................167 lbs

Douglas Pruit...........................1973....................98 lbs

Richard Coleman.................. 1974....................98 lbs

Allan Fulghum......................... 1974...................191 lbs

Allan Fulghum.........................1975…..Heavyweight

Vincent Armstrong..............1979..................138 lbs

Richard Norwood.................1979..................167 lbs

- Earned the Most Pins Award in State Tournament

Vincent Armstrong..............1980..................145 lbs

Keith West..................................1985...................119 lbs

Robert Swain...........................1986...................110 lbs

Keith West..................................1986..................126 lbs

Jerry Fryer..................................1988..................142 lbs

Jerry Fryer..................................1989..................145 lbs

Tim Robinson........................... 1991..................152 lbs

Byron Lawson.........................1993...................112 lbs

Tim Robinson...........................1993..................160 lbs

- Voted Outstanding Wrestler in State Tournament

Byron Lawson.........................1996..................135 lbs

James Aldridge.......................1998..................140 lbs

Anthony Strayham...............1998..................135 lbs

Chris Shealey..........................2000.................125 lbs

Anthony Strayham..............2000.................135 lbs

Danny Finley............................2010..................189 lbs

Daymion Winfrey................. 2024.................138 lbs

ASB's first State Champion Ronald Garrett, wearing glasses and a plaid blazer, smiles while holding a framed photo of himself as a young wrestler. The vintage photo shows him in a wrestling stance, dressed in a red and white uniform. The caption on the photo reads: "RONALD GARRETT, ALA-ALA-GEORGIA STATE CHAMPION, 127 LBS 1962–1963, 36 WINS – 1 TIE – 1 LOSS." Framed wrestling photos are visible in the background, along with the words "A TRADITION OF EXCELLENCE" on the wall.

On The Move

By Heather Jeffcoat

Tawny Holmes Hlibok: A Trailblazer for Deaf Education, Advocacy and Leadership Tawny Holmes Hlibok is a name that resonates across educational, political and advocacy circles—a true pioneer who is redefining the possibilities for individuals with hearing differences. From her academic triumphs to her groundbreaking role as only the second person who is Deaf in history to serve as a White House Fellow, Hlibok's story is one of perseverance, leadership and the power of community.

Currently an Associate Professor in the Department of Deaf Studies at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C., Hlibok has spent her career breaking down barriers for the Deaf Community. Her work aims not just to educate, but to inspire younger generations to dream big and understand that having a hearing difference does not limit one’s potential—it can be the very thing that drives success.

A 2000 graduate of the Alabama School for the Deaf (ASD), Hlibok traces much of her drive and resilience to her formative years at the school. "It was here that I discovered more about myself, my culture and my language," she reflects, speaking fondly of the positive impacts that the institution and its dedicated staff had on her and her peers. "The memories I made are irreplaceable, from giving my all in sports to excelling academically and immersing myself in countless organizations—that is what shaped who I am today."

Like many young people leaving home for the first time, Hlibok faced emotional challenges. Her sophomore year at ASD, in particular, marked a period of homesickness and self-doubt—a phase that is often referred to as the "sophomore blues." But Hlibok’s story was different. She was supported by teachers and mentors who saw her potential long before she did. "ASD’s supportive environment and attentive teachers made a difference," Hlibok recalls, acknowledging how critical that foundation of encouragement and belief in her abilities was to her eventual success.

In an environment where the feeling of being "different" can often lead to isolation, ASD instead embraced its students, breaking down the notion that anyone with a disability was at a disadvantage. For Hlibok, this was transformative. She was constantly reminded of her unique leadership qualities, and those around her encouraged her to nurture them. It was here that she began to understand the true power of community and mentorship—two principles that would guide her throughout her career.

After graduating from ASD in 2000, Hlibok continued her academic journey at Gallaudet University, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and Deaf Studies. Her commitment to academic excellence was matched only by her dedication to extracurricular activities. A natural leader, Hlibok served on the student government throughout her time at Gallaudet, culminating in her role as president in 2004-2005. She also became deeply involved in Greek life as the executive secretary for Phi Kappa Zeta sorority. And beyond the classroom, she was a staple in a variety of campus organizations—academic bowl, basketball, cheerleading, drama club, and even sports like soccer, track, and volleyball.

Her involvement extended beyond Gallaudet’s campus, where she worked to strengthen the ties between the National Honor Society, Optimist Club, and Junior National Association of the Deaf (where she served as president). These leadership roles became the building blocks for a career that would challenge traditional perceptions of what individuals who are deaf could achieve.

Hlibok’s pursuit of higher education didn’t stop with her undergraduate degree. She went on to earn a Juris Doctorate from the University of Baltimore with a concentration in Family Law. All the while, she remained steadfast in her belief that success comes from hard work, dedication, and actively seeking opportunities outside the classroom.

It is a message she often shares with the students she now mentors. "Always keep your eyes open to opportunities that spark your interest beyond the classroom," Hlibok advises. This mantra reflects her belief that education is not confined to textbooks or lecture halls—learning and growth happen through involvement in the broader world.

Her own career is a testament to this philosophy. Hlibok is a prime example of how individuals with disabilities can excel in multiple arenas, whether in education, policy, or leadership. She was appointed as the first-ever executive director who is deaf of the Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf, further solidifying her role as a trailblazer in the field of Deaf Education.

As a White House Fellow, Hlibok's impact reaches beyond academia and into the very heart of American government. Only the second person who is deaf in history to hold such a prestigious position, she uses her platform to advocate for greater inclusivity and representation of the Deaf Community in all spheres of life. Her work continues to break down barriers and create opportunities for those who have been historically marginalized.

Reflecting on her journey, Hlibok credits much of her success to the unwavering support she received from institutions like ASD and Gallaudet, which helped her develop the skills, confidence and leadership necessary to succeed in life. "The heart of the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind’s mission is rooted in believing in and investing in each student for a lifelong purpose, and I am living proof of that," Hlibok says.

Her story is not just one of academic achievement, but also of emotional growth and resilience—of a young woman who overcame challenges to redefine what it means to be Deaf in today’s world. For Hlibok, the sky truly is the limit, and she continues to inspire countless others to reach for it.

In a world that often seeks to define people by their limitations, Tawny Holmes Hlibok is a living, breathing example that potential is limitless—especially when it is nurtured by a community that believes in you. And for the students at Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind and beyond, her message is clear: the future belongs to those who dare to dream, no matter the obstacles they may face.

Tawny Holmes Hlibok smiles at the camera wearing a royal blue dress and gold earrings. She has shoulder-length brown hair and glasses.

Tawny Holmes Hlibok and ASD teacher the late Jerry Shaw celebrating ASD’s first Academic Bowl win in 1998. Tawny wears a maroon polo and has shoulder length brown hair. She raises her arms in celebration. Mr. Shaw is behind her looking at something off screen.

In The News

Just some of AIDB's Many Headline-Making Moments

By Heather Jeffcoat

Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB) is in the news! Across Alabama, media outlets are sharing stories of the Institute's successes, from farm visits to clothing assistance for students. These reports highlight the dedication of our staff and the achievements of our students in all our programs.

1 - From colorful zinnias to clucking chickens, WVTM 13's Brittany Decker got a firsthand look at the Joe Tom Armbrester Agricultural Center. She joined students from across all AIDB schools to learn about their year-round work tending to the farm's bounty.

Matt Armbrester speaks on camera with sunflowers behind him. He wears a camouflage baseball cap, a blue work shirt, and sunglasses hung around his neck. In the bottom right corner, the Project Community and WVTM logos overlay the screen.

2 – The Alabama News Center shared news of a partnership between Alabama Power and AIDB, with Alabama Power generously donating funds for the construction of the Student Life and Conference Center.

Six Individuals smile at the camera. They wear business professional attire. Two individuals hold a check.

3 - Business Alabama recently featured the Modern Manufacturing Program at E. H. Gentry Facility, emphasizing the opportunity it provides for students aged 16 and older to train for careers in modern manufacturing.

A male student speaks on camera from inside AIDB THREADS. He wears a black dress shirt and a black tie with white polka dots. Behind him, racks containing clothes can be seen. In the bottom right-hand corner, the ABC 33/40 overlays the screen.

4 – From job training to essential clothing, ABC 33/40 spotlighted the many benefits of AIDB Threads, a new program at E. H. Gentry Facility serving students across the AIDB campus.

A still shot from the grand opening of AIDB THREADS. Jessica Edmiston speaks from behind a podium while wearing a red suit. An American Sign Language interpreter wearing black interprets beside her. Individuals from the audience are looking on while seated.

AIDB At A Glance

Upcoming Events Across AIDB

APRIL 3 - JOIN THE CLUB... THE AIDB CLUB FUNDRAISER

The outside of “The Club” features the words a sign reading “The Club” in red cursive. The sky is blue above.

Join the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB) Foundation for an elegant evening at The Club, Inc. in Birmingham, Alabama. Entertainment will be provided by jazz artist Eric Essix and vocalist Alie B. Gorrie and special performances by AIDB students! A networking reception will begin at 5:30 p.m. and dinner will be served at 6:00 p.m. To become a sponsor or for more information, contact Becky Watson, Chief Institutional Advancement Officer and Executive Director of the AIDB Foundation, at (256) 761-3318.

MAY 1 - ALABAMA SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND BAND CONCERT

Experience the incredible talent of students from the Alabama School for the Blind (ASB) and enjoy an evening of powerful music. The spring band concert will be held on the ASB campus at 7:00 p.m. and will showcase the hard work and dedication of ASB’s students. Join us for a night of unforgettable melodies!

A student with dreads and glasses plays the trumpet while outside.

MAY 23 - GRADUATION DAY

Since 1858, Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB) has provided superior education for students who are Deaf, Blind, DeafBlind and Multidisabled to empower them to reach their limitless potential. This year’s graduation exercises at AIDB will be held on Friday, May 23, 2025 beginning with the annual Baccalaureate Service. Graduations will then be held at the Helen Keller School of Alabama at 1:30 p.m., the Alabama School for the Blind at 3:00 p.m., and the Alabama School for the Deaf at 6:00 p.m.

A female student wearing a maroon cap and gown smiles at the camera. She wears a bright yellow valedictorian stole.

JUNE 1 - 6 - AIDB SUMMER CAMPS

Join us at the Alabama School for the Blind and the Alabama School for the Deaf for a fun-filled week designed to inspire and educate students who are Blind, Deaf, hard of hearing, or visually impaired through exciting adventures and activities! For more information or to sign up, contact AIDB’s Admissions Department at 1-800-532-4622 or [admissions@aidb.org](mailto:admissions@aidb.org).

A boy student wearing a black polo signs “I Love You” in American Sign Language.

JULY 19 - CHRISTMAS IN JULY

Save the date for Christmas in July at Pier 59! Featuring a boat poker run, live auction, raffle, fun, live music and more, proceeds from this exhilarating event help purchase Christmas gifts for students at AIDB.

Two women wearing gray shirts smile at the camera.

Momentum

Updates from the AIDB President's Staff

JESSICA EDMISTON  
CHIEF ADULT PROGRAMS OFFICER

The sign for "Momentum" in American Sign Language (ASL) is described by a member of the Deaf Community as "energy," "moving forward," "progress," "continuation" and "success." However, if one wants to learn how to sign "Momentum" in the correct context, taking an ASL class has become easier within the Opelika Regional Center which received a $2,250 East Alabama Community Foundation award to establish an ASL Summer Bootcamp with the premise to replicate the initiative statewide in AIDB's nine other Regional Centers. To learn more, visit www.aidb.org or contact Office of Field Services Executive Director Jenny Savage, savage.jenny@aidb.org.

Jessica Edmiston with curly brown hair smiles at the camera. She wears a navy blazer and a necklace.

AMANDA FULLER  
EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT

I am feeling the "end of school" nerves. We are always busy in the President's Office, but we are really busy from now through May. There is a quote in Out of Silence and Darkness that is appropriate every year at this time. "Busy people are happy people and around here we are delirious." This will be true until after graduation. I enjoy having the opportunity to be with the seniors during activities, especially for them.

Amanda Fuller with short gray hair smiles at the camera.

MICHAEL HUBBARD  
CHIEF SAFETY AND SECURITY OFFICER

AIDB is enhancing campus safety with security laminates, weapon detection systems and advanced cameras for real-time monitoring. These improvements, paired with drills and training, ensure a secure learning environment. Additionally, the Enterprise Resource Planning update to Oracle Fusion is officially underway. This project will equip our staff with the tools they need to better serve our limitless students and clients, enhancing efficiency and support across the board. AIDB's Transportation department is in the process of upgrading exterior lighting and camera systems on all of our buses. Backlit LED panels on the front and rear of each bus will provide increased visibility to other vehicles. Updated camera systems will allow instantaneous monitoring of not only video but vehicle location, speed, and driver actions.

Michael Hubbard looks at the camera. He wears a suit and tie and has short gray hair.

JOEY HUTTO  
CHIEF FACILITIES AND CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT OFFICER

The Physical Plant Department has been busy with multiple campus projects improving our facilities for our students and staff. We have just recently completed decorative site perimeter fencing at the Alabama School for the Blind. This past fall we contracted with Modern Mechanical to provide heating and cooling systems at our Alabama School for the Deaf and Alabama School for the Blind gymnasiums. Two major projects currently underway are dormitory renovations to Taylor Hall at the Alabama School for the Deaf and the Elliott Cottages dormitories at the Helen Keller School. Each dorm will be totally renovated, both interior and exterior, with all new finishes, complete new roof systems, painting, lighting, new restrooms and ADA upgrades. At our AIDB-North Campus we are currently under way with our Student Activity Center. Ground was broken in December for this facility which will house a regulation basketball court, a stage for performances, full cafeteria and kitchen, as well as two large meeting rooms which will also serve as FEMA rated storm shelters that will accommodate students and staff for our entire campus in the event of inclement weather.

Joey Hutto, a middle-aged man with light brown hair and glasses, wearing a grey blazer, light blue shirt, and yellow tie, smiling in front of a neutral background.

ANDY KEITH  
CHIEF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS OFFICER

AIDB was awarded a $65,000 College and Career Readiness Grant to be split between the three K-12 schools to provide enrichment opportunities for students. Health and Clinical Services received two rolling audiology vans to provide audiology services in rural areas. The Child Nutrition Program passed its State Administrative audit review with raving reviews. RISE Together Preschool hosted an open house and Short-Term Programs kicked off its spring courses.

Andy Keith, a middle-aged man with short gray hair, smiling and wearing a light blue button-up shirt, standing indoors with a softly lit background.

KELLEY PARK  
CHIEF HUMAN RESOURCES OFFICER

AIDB teamed up with NASCAR to sponsor a donation drive at the Talladega Superspeedway for those impacted by Hurricane Helene. Alabama Industries for the Blind raised $1,460 to help impacted employees at the Moody Air Force Base Supply Center. In October 2024, we had a record 400 applications! Human Resources (HR) attended 7 job fairs and welcomed 2 new members to the team: Nick Barnes, HR Development and Training Coordinator and Aletheia Webb, HR Clerk.

Kelley Park, a woman with long, wavy red hair, smiling and wearing a black blazer over a patterned blouse, posed in front of a plain blue background.

JONATHAN SHERBERT  
CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

AIDB’s Business Services Department is proud to provide essential financial and administrative services for our students, staff and clients. From procurement and payroll to accounting and budgeting, we are committed to delivering these services with accuracy, integrity and transparency. As we prepare to implement our new Oracle Fusion Cloud ERP, we look forward to enhancing operational efficiency and modernizing our financial systems. This innovative solution will streamline processes, improve data-driven decision-making and strengthen our ability to support AIDB’s mission.

Jonathan Sherbert, a man with white-gray hair, wearing glasses and a dark suit, accompanied by a white shirt and tie. He is smiling at the camera against a plain dark background.

BECKY WATSON  
CHIEF INSTITUTIONAL ADVANCEMENT OFFICER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR AIDB FOUNDATION

The AIDB Foundation had a successful year of fundraising and was able to contribute over $812,000 back in funding opportunities to students and consumers of AIDB in 2024. Three fundraisers were held this past year, the Acts of Kindness, the Christmas in July-Pier 59 and the Jazz at the JTA. These fundraisers, along with private donations allow our students and consumers many opportunities they would not otherwise receive.

We are also pleased to announce that our advertising campaign video was honored with an EMMY Award this past summer. We are excited that our awareness campaign has been so well received across Alabama as we continue to prioritize telling the AIDB Story.

This year for 2025, the events and dates for our fundraisers are: Join the Club the “AIDB” Club at the Club in Birmingham on April 3rd; Christmas in July at Pier 59 on July 19th and a clay shooting event at Selwood Farms on October 31st. Thank you to all who contribute and support the AIDB Foundation!

Becky Watson, a woman with short blonde hair, is smiling at the camera. She is wearing pearl earrings and a pearl necklace with a white top against a softly blurred background.

Perspectives

Updates from the AIDB student leaders

Shymiriya Broadnax  
SGA President   
Alabama School for the Blind

Shymiriya, a young woman with natural hair styled in two puffs, is smiling warmly at the camera. She is wearing a burgundy zip-up jacket and small hoop earrings. The background is the outdoors with a soft blur.

My name is Shymiriya Broadnax, and I am honored to serve as the Student Government Association (SGA) President at the Alabama School for the Blind (ASB). I am thrilled to share some of the highlights from this school year and our upcoming events with you.

At ASB, we offer a wide range of activities for every student. Whether through academics, extracurriculars or community involvement, there is something for everyone. Personally, my time here has been transformative and I am excited to share the great things happening at our school.

This year, we have elected our new SGA officers, and we are already working on ideas to make positive changes at ASB. As SGA President, my top priority is advocating for the needs and voices of our student body. One initiative I am particularly passionate about is encouraging our SGA members to participate in community service. Giving back not only strengthens the community but also builds character and teaches valuable life skills. We have already taken part in a couple of service events and we have many more planned for the year ahead.

Some of our other exciting accomplishments include:

* Our Dairy Quiz Bowl team recently won the State 4-H Competition and earned a spot in the National Championship in Louisville, Kentucky.
* Three of our 12th-grade students traveled to Washington, D.C., for a memorable Close-Up experience. From all accounts, it was a trip they will never forget.
* Our wrestling team continues to win in their competitions and be a great ambassador for our school.
* The competition cheer team qualified for the state competition thanks to their dedication and hard work.

ASB offers many extracurricular activities including cheerleading, track, wrestling, swimming, band, 4-H, horseback riding and more. Some of our students even have after-school jobs while others enjoy spending time with friends and participating in other activities.

This year, we also introduced our new school mascot: the Red Wolves. In addition, our campus is undergoing some exciting improvements including a new security gate and a new playground for students to enjoy.

There are also plenty of fun, school-related trips ahead. In addition to those, dorm students will have the opportunity to participate in non-school-related outings. Some high school students have recently received laptops, which we are all excited and thankful for. We also have students in dual-enrollment programs, allowing them to take college-level courses. With the arrival of new students and teachers, ASB continues to grow and we feel lucky to be part of such a supportive community.

Our school is dedicated to helping students succeed both academically and personally. Our teachers and staff provide the guidance we need to thrive in the real world. They emphasize hard work, determination and confidence, teaching us that we are capable of achieving anything we set our minds to.

Personally, I am extremely grateful for my time at ASB. I have learned so much and feel supported every step of the way. ASB offers a nurturing environment where I can continue to grow and pursue my goals.

George Meyer  
SGA President  
Helen Keller School

George, a young man with short brown hair, is wearing black-framed glasses and smiling at the camera. He is dressed in a light blue plaid button-up shirt and positioned against a brick wall background.

As we move through the school year at Helen Keller School of Alabama (HKS), there is so much to celebrate and look forward to! From special events to exciting opportunities, it has been a memorable time for all of us and we are thrilled to share some highlights that have made this school year so incredible.

Since the first day of school, there have been so many fun and memorable moments. I have enjoyed walking around campus, sometimes by myself, just taking in the beauty of our school and reflecting on all the wonderful experiences. I have also had the privilege of helping Mrs. Hope in the gift shop and working with Mrs. Mikita at the coffee shop, which has been both fun and rewarding.

One of the standout events this year has to be the volleyball state tournament—our team played their hearts out and made us all so proud! And who could forget the Tailgate? The spirit, the food and the fun all made it an event to remember. Another special memory was when Tierece and I had the chance to take food to the local fire department. It was a small gesture, but one that brought our school community closer together.

It is not just the fun moments that have kept us excited; there have been some truly incredible milestones and new additions to our school. We kicked off the year with something we have all been waiting for—student badges! They are a symbol of our growing school spirit.

The school picnic was another highlight, bringing us all together for a day of games, laughter and connection. And of course, the Christmas program was a shining moment for our community—there is nothing quite like seeing our school come together to celebrate the season with music and cheer.

What I love most about HKS is the sense of belonging and the opportunity to meet so many amazing people. It has been great to make new friendships while continuing to grow the ones I have had for years. The relationships I have built with students, teachers, and staff are what truly make this school special to me.

If there is one thing I want everyone to know about HKS, it is how much fun we have here! From field trips to sports events, from the exciting tailgate to the unforgettable Christmas program, there is always something happening that brings us all together. HKS is a place where you can make memories that last a lifetime.

A huge shoutout to Mrs. Mikita for going above and beyond this year. Not only does she teach us so much with her unique approach to learning, but she also made my birthday extra special by surprising me with a cake and singing “Happy Birthday.” Moments like that remind me of the warmth and care that our teachers put into making HKS feel like a family.

As we continue through the year, there is so much I am looking forward to. Of course, I can not wait to see my friends, teachers and the entire staff every day. And I’m especially excited about the off-campus work at the Alabama Industries for the Blind, where we get real-world experience that prepares us for the future.

But above all, what excites me the most is basketball season! It is such a fun time of year, filled with school spirit and thrilling games. And of course, I am counting down the days to my graduation—there is a sense of accomplishment and excitement in the air as we approach that milestone.

There is no doubt that the second half of the year is just as full of joy and excitement as the first. With all of the amazing events and opportunities coming up, I know we will continue to make the most of our time together at HKS.

Here is to finishing the year strong, making more memories and celebrating the unique spirit that makes HKS a place like no other.

The A. I. D. B. Logo with the “Deaf. Blind. Limitless.” tagline.

P.O. Box 698  
Talladega, AL 35161

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Ways YOU Can Make a Difference

DONATE TO AIDB’S ANNUAL FUND CAMPAIGN.

SUPPORT ACADEMIC OR EXTRA-CURRICULAR PROGRAMS.

ESTABLISH A PLANNED OR LEGACY GIFT.

MAKE A GIFT OF APPROPRIATE SECURITIES.

CREATE AN ENDOWMENT FUND.

Ford Courington, a student at Alabama School for the Blind, sits at a desk in a school classroom, smiling toward the camera. He's wearing a colorful geometric-patterned hoodie, dark sunglasses, and a red and black cap with "Red Wolves" written on it. In the background, another student can be seen sitting at a desk, slightly out of focus.